

## Media release

### NAAJA concerned about deteriorating prison conditions

The North Australian Aboriginal Justice Agency (NAAJA) has called on the NT Government to provide urgent independent oversight of conditions in NT prisons and youth detention centres, and to take steps to address the increased risks of harm.

The numbers of prisoners on remand in the Northern Territory has skyrocketed in recent years, from 335 in 2020 to an alarming 903 in 2024, with many eventually found not guilty or charges are withdrawn.

NAAJA is concerned that 35 female prisoners have this week been transferred from Alice Springs and are being housed in overcrowded and inappropriate conditions at the Darwin Correctional Centre. Twenty men have also been transferred from the Darwin Correctional Centre to the already overcrowded Alice Springs Correctional Centre. This is in addition to the upcoming closure of the Alice Springs Youth Detention Centre that will see all young people in detention from Alice Springs transferred to Darwin.

These transfer arrangements have been put in place as a result of overcrowding in Northern Territory prisons and watchhouses and will see detainees being transferred away from family, their community support structures, and legal services. The Corrections Commissioner Varley has said female prisoners are sleeping on mattresses on the floor and the United Workers Union, which represents prisons officers, say they are being housed in a library and workshop.

NAAJA Acting Deputy CEO, Matthew Connop said, 'Aboriginal people in custody need to be close to their home communities. It is vital that family can visit, and that they can access local support services. This is especially important for incredibly vulnerable Aboriginal children and young people.'

'The current overcrowding is leading to an increased use of lockdowns and this is a disaster waiting to happen', said Mr Connop

NAAJA is calling on the NT Government to take urgent steps to ensure the safety of Aboriginal people in custody and to reduce the pressure on prison numbers. This includes urgently appointing independent monitors to report on conditions in the prisons to ensure the operational needs of the prison do not overtake the human rights and dignity of those in custody, and court-integrated intensive bail support programs.

**1800 898 251**  
reception@naaja.org.au  
www.naaja.org.au  
ABN: 63 118 017 842

**Darwin**  
61 Smith Street  
Darwin NT 0801  
Tel: 08 8982 5100  
Free: 1800 898 251

**Katherine**  
10 Third Street  
Katherine NT 0851  
Tel: 08 8972 5000  
Free: 1800 897 728

**Alice Springs**  
Level 2, 16 Hartley Street  
Alice Springs NT 0870  
Tel: 08 8950 9300  
Free: 1800 636 097

**Tennant Creek**  
61 Paterson Street  
Tennant Creek NT 0860  
Tel: 08 8962 1332  
Free: 1800 636 097

**Media contact**

Comments in this media release other than direct quotes can be attributed to a NAAJA spokesperson.

Anthony Beven, 0419 218 518, [anthony.beven@naaja.org.au](mailto:anthony.beven@naaja.org.au)

NAAJA MR2024-02

30 October 2024